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April 1, 2022

Dear Interns, Residents and Fellows of the UVM Medical Center,

Let me begin by thanking all of you for the extraordinary efforts you have made during this horrific pandemic. This has been an extremely difficult time for Vermont and the nation and you, and other health care practitioners, have gone well beyond the call of duty in protecting the wellbeing of your patients. Thank you.

As you may know, I recently had the opportunity to visit the UVM Medical Center and sit down with many of the residents there to learn about your efforts to form a union. After hearing what you had to say, and getting an understanding of your day-to-day experiences on the job, I believe you are right. UVM residents need a union.

Many Vermonters understand, as patients, that our health care system is broken in many ways. But what they might not see is that the system is broken for residents as well. Interns, residents and fellows should not have to work 80 hours a week because the old system of medicine allowed for it. They should not have to give up everything in their lives, take no days off, hold off on having children, and take on debilitating debt – all to be good doctors. They should not be forced to live on salaries that are so low that many of them struggle to pay for basic needs like housing and child care. We can do better than that and your advocacy and your persistence is what will inevitably change our system.

Patients want and deserve physicians who treat them to be rested, not unduly stressed and adequately compensated for their difficult and vitally important work. That really is not too much to ask.

Today, with more than 330 residents working in the hospital, you make up the majority of the doctors caring for Vermonters. I am particularly interested in this situation because, as you know, the funding for your salaries and training comes from the federal government through the Medicare Graduate Medical Education program.

It seems to me that by joining together and exercising their right to organize, physicians can ensure not only better wages and working conditions for themselves, but they will improve care for their patients.

It should not be a surprise that there is opposition to your efforts to organize. There are some who are hesitant to change the “good old ways” that residents have been trained. There are others who may not be excited about ending the top down decision-making process which currently exists. I must say, however, that whatever your views on the union may be, we should all be concerned that the hospital is spending a significant amount of health care dollars on very high-priced union busting attorneys.

To my mind, the bottom line here is simple. Residents deserve a seat at the table to help make decisions that impact your lives, your profession and your patients. And that’s what a union does.

There is no one that I would trust more to advocate for our healthcare system in Vermont than the frontline health care workers who risked their lives to care for us during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Your efforts to unionize will only ensure we are better prepared for the next years of recovery and for the quality health care that all Vermonters deserve.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS  
UNITED STATES SENATOR